

A STUDY OF JUDGES & RUTH

EXCELLENSE

Yeah, you read that right. A school had on their sign out front, “We Are Committed to Excellence.” No offense, but their commitment to excellence seems lacking. This contradictory commitment sounds like the genuine article. However, on closer inspection, just because it looked right to the eyes of the sign-maker, didn’t make it true.

The final five chapters of *Judges* tell two stories that form the epilogue. As we’ll see in our passage today and repeated throughout the rest of the book, the author notes, “*In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*”

This self-selected morality doomed Israel to a terrible fate. In the preceding chapters, violence and oppression came from outside invaders—idolaters and sinners who served pagan gods. In the epilogue, no longer does the story follow individual judges and no longer does violence and oppression come from outside Israel. God’s people turned against themselves, doing what was right in their own eyes.

JUDGES 17:5–13

⁵ And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods, and ordained one of his sons, who became his priest. ⁶ In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

⁷ Now there was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. ⁸ And the man departed from the town of Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn where he could find a place. And as he journeyed, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. ⁹ And Micah said to him, “Where do you come from?” And he said to him, “I am a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to sojourn where I may find a place.” ¹⁰ And Micah said to him, “Stay with me, and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and your living.” And the Levite went in. ¹¹ And the Levite was content to dwell with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. ¹² And Micah ordained the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. ¹³ Then Micah said, “Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

At several points in our study we’ve mentioned “God’s Law.” But what is it? What does it mean for us today?

Scan the QR code for a video explaining, not just what God’s Law is, but what it’s supposed to do. Spoiler alert, it points us to Jesus. Jesus fulfilled the Law. Likewise, when we come into a relationship with Jesus, Jesus fulfills the Law in us—the spiritual blindfold comes off, sin’s shackles release, and we’re set free to love as God loves, fulfilling the Law.



DISCUSSION

If you could have dinner with anyone living, who would it be and what would you eat?

ICEBREAKER

1. What religious items did Micah possess in his own home? (5)

OBSERVATION

2. How does the author describe this time-period? (6)

3. What did Micah say after hiring the Levite? (13)

4. Why did Micah hire the Levite? What does his statement imply about his view of God? (12-13)

INTERPRETATION

5. How might you justify sinful behavior, claiming God’s support? How can you protect yourself against such thinking?

APPLICATION

Has there been a time when you’ve come into a personal relationship with God through Jesus? Are you sure you know him? If you have any questions, talk to your Coach today!

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STUDY NOTES THE HOUSE THAT RUTH BUILT

After years of sharing the same ballpark, in 1920 the New York baseball Giants gave the Yankees an eviction notice. That season, the Yankees new star player, Babe Ruth, helped the team draw more people to the facility than the actual owners and they'd had enough. The Yankees built the first three-tiered sports facility, doubling the seating capacity of other facilities from 30,000 to 60,000. The stadium opened in 1923. That year, the Babe led the Yankees to their first World Series. Although Yankee owner, Jacob Ruppert, put up the money, Yankees Stadium would always be called the "House that Ruth Built."

What if your fame and athletic prowess led a team owner to build a stadium to showcase it? While that may not be 100% of what happened with Yankee stadium, it's not that far off either. As we open today's passage, we'll meet a **man** named **Micah**. Micah sought to build a "house" of his own. He wanted fortune and fame. And, he wanted to show it off. What he didn't know was that his self-focused, self-aggrandizing actions would have such grave consequences.

GODLY LEADERS MUST RESPECT GOD'S WILL (PART I)

Micah's story opened with a confession to his own mother. As she called down a curse on the thief, Micah confessed that he had stolen 1,100 pieces of silver from her. In her gladness, she blessed him, and made a carved image and a metal image out of 200 pieces of silver that she gave to him—so much for the curse. **The man Micah used the images for his shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods, and ordained one of his sons, who became his priest.**

Micah had set up a little temple *in his own house!* Everything about this scene is wrong. He worshipped gods instead of the One True God. He created and established objects of worship. Finally, he made a priest of his son. He had no authority to do any of these things and every single element directly violated God's Law.

One day, a man appeared on Micah's doorstep. **Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to sojourn where I may find a place."** God had established that only Levites could be priests according to the Law. Micah had a chance to legitimize his endeavor. He fired his son and hired the Levite.

It's here we see Micah's true motivation. **Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest."** To be clear, God cannot be manipulated, nor does he bless sin. Even if prosperity came, destruction would follow. Micah's ignorance, pride, and sinful heart were on full display.

Micah had it all when another group of men arrived. Micah's priest blessed them on their journey, even declaring "*the eye of the Lord*" was upon them. This seems more like fortune cookie, crystal ball, hocus pocus than actual prophecy, but the men bought it. Soon they reported back all that they'd found.

These men were spies from the tribe of Dan. As we read long ago in Judges 1, like the other tribes, Dan had failed to clear the Land given to them. They started looking for a new home and their spies had found them one. Better yet, when Dan went to go conquer their new home up north, they stopped by Micah's place and stole his items of worship and even his priest. Micah's fame and fortune spread, and then someone else took it.

DISRESPECT CAN BRING SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

When a person gets drunk, they want to do what feels best right then, regardless of the consequences. They can't think about tomorrow because they're stuck in the moment. That's a great picture of sin. When a person gives over completely to sin, they seek immediate gratification and can't see or understand the consequences. We call this lack of vision "spiritual blindness."

Spiritual blindness has many consequences. People reject the Lord and his work because they just can't see it (Romans 1:20). It also leads them to reject his Word because they just can't understand it. Perhaps before knowing the Lord, you even said, "I just don't understand what I'm reading in the Bible" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Respecting the Lord and his will means maintaining an eternal perspective—that's the opposite of spiritual blindness. Had Micah had an eternal perspective, he would have known his actions would have devastating consequences. His actions directly emboldened the tribe of Dan to give up what the Lord had blessed and to take by force what was not theirs to have.

Micah's greed left him with nothing but the blood of innocents on his hands. We might say, "How could he have known?" Although we may not know the particular consequences of our sin—the end of the sin's road is *always* death (James 1:15).